

We must never forget Canada is building on tremendous strengths

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Canadians leapt to the defence of our military last month when it came under fire from a little-known American comedian.

Outraged cabinet ministers, members of Parliament and ordinary citizens demanded an apology from Greg Gutfeld, who based a segment of his late night show on Fox News on the notion put forward by a Canadian general that our military would need a time out to rebuild after the Afghanistan mission.

While the response was laudable for its expression of loyalty in a time of war, it also reflected the thin skin and insecurity of our national psyche.

It was never clear why we should care what an obscure comedian and his cronies say about us in the middle of the night, other than we are still far too dependent on outsiders for validation.

As if to emphasize the point, this whole affair occurred at a time when the value of things Canadian is being brought into sharp focus by both the world economic crisis and many of the reforms that President Barack Obama wants to bring to the United States.

Our banks and the fiscal capacity of our governments are the envy of the world. Boring is an insult no longer; it's a compliment.

Our health care system is being eyed as enough of a threat by opponents to Obama's ambitious plans to expand the public system in the U.S. that it has come under attack.

Most recently, commentators were asking pointedly if our socialized system killed actor Natasha Richardson, citing the four hours it took for her to get specialized attention after she was injured in a fall on a Quebec ski hill.

In the just-released Canadian edition of his best-selling guide to cities, academic Richard Florida says our urban municipalities need to stop being so humble, because they already have many of the qualities American cities are trying to achieve.

They have a strong middle class, relatively safe streets, dense urban footprints, a strong social safety net and well-educated workers.

Florida has made a career of channeling the ideas of urban theorists, including the legendary Jane Jacobs, who like Florida moved to Toronto from the United States, through his own creativity index.

Measuring the "creative class," which he defines essentially as people who are paid to think -- Ottawa, the city that most Canadians like to think of as Dullsville on the Rideau -- ranks as the most creative as well as the most educated in the country, higher than New York, San Francisco or London.

Florida argues that Vancouver and Victoria are well poised as part of the Cascadia region to outperform as the economy recovers as a world-class economic hub.

We concede there is some irony here in quoting an expert with an American perspective to illustrate our point that we need to be less provincial in the way we see ourselves.

So be it. Old habits die hard.

The important thing to do as we struggle through these trying economic times is to take time to recognize that while our daily lives we focus on our problems and the things we would like to improve, that we we are building on tremendous strengths that should never be forgotten.

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